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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 001821

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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE AND EUR/WE

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SUBJECT: ITALY/ALBANIA - GOI CONDITIONS AID PLEDGE TO GOA:
"HELP US TO HELP YOU"

REF: ROME 1393

CLASSIFIED BY: POL MC TOM COUNTRYMAN. REASON:1.5 (B)(D).
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PAGE 02 ROME 01821 111613Z

1. (U) ACTION REQUEST. SEE PARA 5.

2. (C) ON APRIL 9, BALKAN OFFICE HEAD MAURIZIO MASSARI AND MFA UNDER SECRETARY ROBERTO ANTONIONE HAD "EXTREMELY PRODUCTIVE AND ENCOURAGING" MEETINGS IN TIRANA WITH PRIME MINISTER MAJKO, FOREIGN MINISTER DADE, AND ECONOMIC MINISTER MEKSI. MASSARI TOLD POLOFF APRIL 10 THAT THE GOI AND GOA RENEWED A PROTOCOL OF COOPERATION, AND THE GOI PLEDGED 202 MILLION EUROS IN AID THROUGH 2004 FOR, INTER ALIA, INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT, ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT, AND AGRICULTURE. MOST SIGNIFICANT, SAID MASSARI, WAS 30 MILLION EUROS EARMARKED FOR ENERGY, FOLLOWING UP ON A PLEDGE BY PM BERLUSCONI TO PM MAJKO DURING THE LATTER'S VISIT TO ROME LAST MONTH (REFTEL). THE FUNDS WERE TO BE USED TO PURCHASE ELECTRICITY TO "KEEP THE LIGHTS ON" FOR THE SHORT TERM, BUT ALSO TO BUILD A VIABLE ENERGY GENERATION INFRASTRUCTURE FOR LONG TERM ENERGY PRODUCTION. "WE WERE VERY FRANK" WITH THE ALBANIANS, SAID MASSARI. THE GOI EXPECTS THE GOA TO PLAN FOR THE FUTURE. HE SAID THAT ANTONIONE REMINDED THE ALBANIANS THAT THE CAUSE OF THEIR ENERGY PROBLEMS WAS "NOT ONLY THE WEATHER." THE GOI WANTS TO SEE ITS AID GO TO PROJECTS THAT WILL "CORRECT PAST MISTAKES."

3. (C) THE GOA IS HEARING A SIMILAR MESSAGE FROM THE EU REGARDING OPENING STABILIZATION AND ASSOCIATION (SAA) NEGOTIATIONS, SAID MASSARI. THE GOI'S VIEW IS THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS SHOULD START BEFORE JUNE. HOWEVER, ANTONIONE REMINDED THE GOA THAT THERE ARE MANY SKEPTICS, IN THE EU AND OSCE, WHO QUESTION THE GOA'S ABILITY AND COMMITMENT TO CHANGE, THEREFORE RAPID PROGRESS ON NEEDED REFORMS WAS
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ROME 01821 111613Z
CRITICAL. MASSARI SAID THE MESSAGE WAS RECEIVED AND ACKNOWLEDGED BY ALL THEIR INTERLOCUTORS.

4. (C) MASSARI REPEATED THE GOI'S VIEW (REFTEL) THAT THE IC SHOULD ACKNOWLEDGE GOA REFORMS TO DATE, SUCH AS OVERALL RELATIVE POLITICAL STABILITY, COOPERATION WITH THE GOI IN FIGHTING ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION, AND A RECENT BIPARTISAN PARLIAMENTARY DECISION TO IMPLEMENT ODIHR ELECTORAL SYSTEM REFORMS RECOMMENDATIONS. POTENTIAL INVESTORS NEED A SIGNAL FROM THE IC THAT ALBANIA IS MAKING PROGRESS. WE HAVE TO CONTINUE TO PRESSURE THE GOI TO DO MUCH MORE TO COMBAT ORGANIZED CRIME AND REFORM THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM, AND IN THE GOI'S VIEW STARTING THE SAA NEGOTIATIONS COULD BE PART OF THOSE MEANS. THE NEGOTIATIONS CAN LAST AS LONG AS NECESSARY, AND SERVE AS ANOTHER TOOL TO INFLUENCE GOI ACTIONS.

5. (C) MASSARI'S VIEW IS THAT IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO NOT ACKNOWLEDGE THE GOI'S PROGRESS THUS FAR, AND COULD MAKE IT HARDER FOR THE MAJKO GOVERNMENT TO CONVINCE THE ALBANIAN PEOPLE THAT ECONOMIC REFORMS, SOMETIMES PAINFUL IN THE SHORT TERM, MUST BE ENACTED FOR THE GOOD OF THE COUNTRY'S LONG TERM STABILITY. HE SINGLED OUT THE BRITISH AS AMONG THE MOST SKEPTICAL OF ITALY'S EU PARTNERS REGARDING ALBANIA'S COMMITMENT TO CHANGE, AND WONDERED IF THE U.S. COULD "PUT IN A GOOD WORD" WITH THE BRITS. HE ALSO REPEATED HIS REQUEST FOR A "POSITIVE" U.S. STATEMENT AT THE APRIL 17 FRIENDS OF ALBANIA MEETING IN VIENNA. ACTION REQUEST: POST WOULD LIKE TO GIVE A HEADS-UP TO MASSARI ON THE GENERAL TONE OF OUR INTERVENTION IN VIENNA.
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PAGE 04 ROME 01821 111613Z

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